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TAGS: [BO](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#)

SUBJECT: NGO PARTNERSHIP LEADERS CONVICTED

REF: MINSK 791 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Charge Jonathan Moore for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) On August 4, Judge Leonid Yasinevich convicted four young leaders of the election monitoring NGO "Partnerstvo" (Partnership) for allegedly operating an illegal organization that "infringes on the rights of the Belarusian people" (reftel). In a courtroom open only to international observers and family members, Nikolai Astreiko and Timofei Dranchuk received sentences of two years and one year in prison, respectively. Aleksandr Shalaiko and Enira Bronitskaya were sentenced to six months' imprisonment. All sentences include time served; since the four were arrested on February 21, Shalaiko and Bronitskaya should be released later this month.

¶2. (C) Amidst heavy security, Charge offered comfort and condolences to family members and supporters of the accused at Tsentralniy Courthouse, including the wives of the accused, Paulina Astreiko and Vera Shalaiko, who are both several months pregnant. Also present at the verdict was German Ambassador Martin Hecker, who represented the Finnish EU presidency, and OSCE Deputy Head of Mission Vahram Abadjian.

¶3. (C) Charge gave interviews to independent Belarusian and international media outside the courthouse under a deluge of rain. Charge described the entire trial as politically motivated and designed to intimidate pro-democracy forces in Belarus. He noted that the United States will continue to hold accountable those responsible for abuses of the rights of Belarusian citizens. Charge called on the Belarusian authorities to free the Partnership activists and all those being held on politically motivated charges.

¶4. (C) Charge also conferred with leaders of the Belarusian opposition present at the courthouse, including United Civic Party (UCP) chairman Anatoly Lebedko, UCP Deputy Lyudmila Gryaznova, and Irina Kozulina, the wife of imprisoned former opposition presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin. When asked by Charge, Mrs. Kozulina replied that authorities have not allowed her to visit with her husband since his imprisonment but noted that Kozulin's mother would be allowed to visit Kozulin on her birthday. In response to Charge's question, she expressed enthusiasm for the idea that the Embassy seek access to Kozulin in prison.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: The court's decision to grant international observers access to the verdict was a hollow gesture to the international community, and the fact that the sentences were not the maximum possible in this sham trial is not comfort. The court's adamant and repeated refusal to allow the US, OSCE, and EU Heads of Mission to observe the proceedings prior to the verdict suggests that the regime is not willing

to risk exposing and possibly compromising BKGB sources and methods of cracking down on prominent civic organizations to protect its already tarnished image in the international community.

Moore